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Human resources management

Joint Inspection Unit

Staff recruitment in United Nations system organizations: a comparative analysis and benchmarking framework

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Staff recruitment in United Nations system organizations: a comparative analysis and benchmarking framework" (see A/67/888).

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Summary

The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Staff recruitment in United Nations system organizations: a comparative analysis and benchmarking framework" (A/67/888) assesses, in the context of the diverse organizational needs of the United Nations system, issues of efficiency, transparency and fairness in the recruitment process, bearing in mind principles such as geographical representation, gender balance and equality of official working languages.

The present note reflects the views of organizations of the United Nations system on the recommendations provided in the report. The views of the system have been consolidated on the basis of inputs provided by member organizations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), which welcomed the report and supported some of its conclusions.

I. Introduction

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Staff recruitment in United Nations system organizations: a comparative analysis and benchmarking framework" (A/67/888) assesses, in the context of the diverse organizational needs of the United Nations system, issues of efficiency, transparency and fairness in the recruitment process, bearing in mind principles such as geographical representation, gender balance and equality of official working languages. The report also addresses recruitment rules, policies and procedures across the United Nations system organizations, focusing on external recruitment leading to appointments of one year or more. It delivers a comparative analysis that identifies commonalities and differences, as well as good practices.

II. General comments

2. Organizations of the United Nations system welcome the report. They generally support its recommendations and confirm that their rules, practices and staffing processes adhere to the fundamental principles set out in the report, while taking into account directives of their governing bodies. They value the report's comprehensive consolidation of current practices and operations within organizations of the United Nations system, which will assist organizations in continuing to improve recruitment and staffing operations. Organizations agree with the need for better harmonization of the recruitment practices across the system and, in principle, welcome the 15 benchmarks and 4 recommendations contained in the report for the further promotion of efficient, transparent and fair recruitment processes across the organizations of the United Nations system.

3. Some organizations believe that a number of the measures proposed, such as assessment centres, or an e-recruitment system, may prove costly and therefore difficult to implement during times of financial constraint, particularly in the case of smaller organizations. They also note that the report includes requirements for hiring that should become mandatory, a position that some agencies indicate are overly prescriptive and not always practical for their purposes. Nevertheless, organizations are fully aware of the need to ensure fair and consistent recruitment and are committed to improving their current practices and implementing the recommendations contained in the report.

III. Specific comments on the recommendations

Recommendation 1

The legislative bodies of United Nations system organizations should direct executive heads to be guided by the 15 recruitment benchmarks proposed in this review when hiring external candidates to fixed-term positions of one year or more.

4. Organizations of the United Nations system, noting that this recommendation is addressed to legislative bodies, support it, and most indicate that the benchmarks are already standard practice. The organizations caution, however, that in some cases the benchmarks themselves can present a situation that results in the lowering

of standards, or at least indicate an inherent conflict, citing as an example benchmark 14, which encourages gender balance, and 15, which refers to equitable geographical distribution. While in both cases the benchmark recognizes "efficiency, competence and integrity" as the paramount employment consideration, agencies note that tension between the two benchmarks exists, and that it cannot always be resolved equitably. Organizations also note that while they support benchmark 9, which calls for harmonizing requirements, it could lead to a reduction in the minimum educational requirements, while at the same time raising language requirements, and that it could be viewed as a factor that might disadvantage candidates from some countries and ultimately lead to a shrinking pool of qualified candidates.

5. In addition, some benchmarks, in particular benchmark 15, do not fully reflect the funding realities that organizations face, that is, voluntary financing versus assessed contributions, and the subsequent need to address the interest of donor countries in the numbers of their nationals represented within the workforce of the organizations of the United Nations system. Thus, for some organizations, strategic and targeted recruitment not only takes into account equitable geographical distribution in relation to Member States, but also different priorities at different points in time, such as the need to address the concerns of underrepresented donor countries. Nevertheless, agencies stress that their recruitment principles promote the representation of nationalities on as wide a geographical basis as possible at all organizational levels, and that the diversity of nationalities among staff is a priority in selection.

6. Organizations also note that in implementing the recommendation the benchmarks will need to be adapted in accordance with the size and nature of the mandates of the organizations. Some organizations also raised concerns with the report's finding that "reasons for exceptions" to the recruitment procedure should be "reported to the relevant legislative body". Organizations note that exceptions to the standard recruitment procedures are strictly kept to a minimum, and are always consistent with the provisions of the rules and regulations of their organizations.

7. The above comments notwithstanding, organizations remain fully committed to the 15 benchmarks proposed by the Joint Inspection Unit and are already working towards the achievement of the benchmarks that have not yet been fully accomplished.

Recommendation 2

Executive heads of United Nations system organizations should report periodically to the legislative bodies on the authority delegated for recruitment, the accountability mechanisms set up in relation to such delegated authority, and their results, in line with benchmark 4.

8. Organizations of the United Nations system support and welcome this recommendation. They note that mechanisms already exist in some organizations in terms of biennial reports to the legislative and governing bodies when reviewing recruitment.

Recommendation 3

Executive heads of United Nations system organizations that have not yet done so should reduce the posting time for vacancies to no more than 30 days and seek the approval of the legislative bodies as appropriate.

9. While most organizations of the United Nations system support and welcome this recommendation, some organizations note that a reduction in posting time for vacancies may reduce the quality of the applicants given that not all vacant positions are advertised through a well-known network such as Inspira.

Recommendation 4

CEB/HLCM should continue to pursue initiatives for harmonizing business practices in recruitment and should extend the scope of its activities in this area.

10. Organizations of the United Nations system support and welcome this recommendation. For example, organizations are participating in the Harmonization of Business Practices initiative of the CEB High-level Committee on Management, which is focused on common recruitment of General Service staff and national officers at field duty stations. Led by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the initiative will contribute to streamlining the sourcing and hiring process of staff locally and will increase the level of collaboration between the organizations of the United Nations system at the country level.

11. Organizations agree with the overall need to harmonize business practices and regularly participate in this regard with other agencies through the subsidiary mechanisms of CEB.